A

SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

AT

WHITE-HALL,

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By *W. FLEETWOOD,*
Chaplain in Ordinary to their MAJESTIES.

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EZEKIEL XXXiij. 31.

And they come unto thee as the People cometh, and they ſit before thee as my People, and they hear thy Words, but they will not do them: For with their Mouth they ſhew much Love, but their heart goeth after their Covetouſneſs.

THeſe Words are part of God's Complaint to and by the Prophet, of the People's Non-Proficiency under the Miniſtry of *Ezekiel* and the other Meſſengers of God's Word; notwithſtanding all the Shew and fair Appearance that they made, notwithſtanding all the Forwardneſs they came with to the Houſe of God, the attentive Diligence they ſat with, and the Love and Liking they pretended to the Sermons of the Prophets.

The Deſcription of this is very plainly laid down in the Text, and it ſhall be my Firſt Buſineſs, to conſider it as plainly, and my Second to aſſign ſome Reaſons as well as I can, Why both the Pro-

phet's heretofore and now our Miniſtry, is ſo unedifying and ineffectual.

Son of Man (ſaith God to the Prophet, in the Verſe before the Text) *the Children of thy People ſtill are talking againſt thee, by the Walls and in the Doors of the Houſes:* by talking *againſt the Prophet* is here meant *about the Prophet*, for it appears both from this, and the following Verſes, That they liked the Prophet mightily; but becauſe they acted contrary to his Inſtructions, they are ſaid to talk *againſt him*, though in Words they talked in his Commendation: *And ſpeak one to another, every One to his Brother, ſaying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the Word that cometh forth from the Lord.*

There could not, one would think, be a better Diſpoſition in the World than this; they were not only careful and ready to hear the Word themſelves, but zealous alſo of their Neighbour's good. They invited each his Brother with great tenderneſs, *Come, I pray you, and hear, what is the Word that cometh forth from the Lord.* Such a good Forwardneſs was very pleaſing heretofore to *David*, *I was glad* (ſaid he *Pſ.* 122. 1.) *when they ſaid unto me, Let us go into the Houſe of the Lord.* But it ended not in Invitations, for they came accordingly.

They come, (ſaith the Text) *as the People cometh*, *i. e.* in great Bands and Companies; they reſort to the Houſe of God in ſuch Multitudes, that it looks like

like the going forth of a Nation to fight, or the gathering together of a People to ſome mighty Purpoſe: to ſpeak in the modern Phraſe, the Place was throng'd exceedingly where-ever this *Ezekiel* preached or propheſied. And,

2*dly*, *They ſit before thee*, ſaith God, *as my People*. They come and ſit as People that profeſs to belong to God peculiarly; as People that would be ſignalized and known by their Relation to him, as diſtinguiſh'd from the whole World. They ſit as gravely and demurely in the Houſe of God, they liſten and attend as heedfully, as is imaginable, ſo that you could not chuſe but take them for God's People. There's all the external tokens and the geſtures of Attention and Devotion poſſible to be ſhown; and there's no Man but would think they met to good Purpoſe. And,

3*dly*, *They hear thy Words*; they did not make this Noiſe and Invitation of each other, and reſorting to the Houſe of God themſelves in ſuch great Companies, for nothing but to gaze about, or ſleep, or talk impertinently, or worſe, but to *hear* the Prophet, and they heard him. They came with full deſign and purpoſe to hear what was the Word that came forth from the Lord; that was their Errand and Intention, to be inſtructed in the Will of God, to know his Precepts and Commands from the Mouth of his Meſſenger and Prophet, and that they heard.

But

But *Laſtly*, they did not only hear, but like, approve and love the Word of God: *With their Mouth they ſhew much Love. And lo* (ſaith the Verſe following the Text) *thou art unto them as a very lovely Song, of one that hath a pleaſant Voice, and can play well on an Inſtrument:* They did not only like the Song it ſeems, but the way of ſinging it, the Grace and Air with which he ſet it off; they did not only approve the *Matter* of the Prophet's Sermon, but the Manner of its delivery too; the comely mien with which he ſpoke, his graceful way of Elocution, and the harmonious Cadence of his Voice. He had all the external Accompliſhments, as well as internal, that a Man could want and wiſh for, and the People took great Notice of it, and had him in Eſteem accordingly. But notwithſtanding all theſe advantageous Ornaments in the Prophet, and all this Forwardneſs to hear, and favourable Diſpoſition in the People towards him, yet it happened to his Sermons, as it does to lovely Songs, they pleaſed the Ear and ſtruck the Fancy for the preſent, but made no deep and ſenſible Impreſſion on the Mind and Underſtanding; they did not influence them to practiſe any whit, what they ſo long'd to hear, and liked when heard and uttered by him; for ſo it follows in the Text: *They hear thy Words, but they will not do them. With their Mouth they ſhew much Love, but their Heart goeth after*

after their Covetouſneſs. This People (as is elſewhere ſaid) *honoureth me with their Lips, but their Heart is far from me.* Which is the ſecond thing I am to ſpeak to, and if I can, aſſign ſome Reaſons how the Prophet's Sermons heretofore, and now our Miniſtry is ſo unedifying and ineffectual: And,

Firſt, One Reaſon of ſome People's Non-Proficiency, may be this very Curioſity here deſcribed, this Itch of hearing One that preach'd ſo ſoftly and ſo ſweetly, and with ſo good a Grace, *That his Words were to them as a very lovely Song, of one that hath a pleaſant Voice.* They came to hear the Word of the Lord becauſe it ſounded ſweetly from his Mouth: Becauſe his Voice was tuneable; his Geſtures and Deportment manly, comely and excelling; his Periods round and flowing, and his Elocution ſweet and powerful. And when Men only come to take in *Sound*, they will unavoidably return *empty*: When they only hunt for *Words*, they muſt not think of catching *things of Subſtance*. And they who are intent upon the *Manner* only, muſt let ſlip the *Matter*. Not that all theſe Qualifications are not very deſirable and advantageous both to Prophet and to People too; and that the One may wiſh for, and the Other labour to attain theſe good Accompliſhments, to the better carrying on the Work, and the greater Edification; but that there is Danger of laying too much Streſs upon theſe Matters:

Matters: The People find themſelves mov'd and affected for the preſent, and are thereby tempted to regard no farther Edification, or to think they have already edified ſufficiently, miſtaking oft, the moving of their Fancies, for Operations on their Judgments and their Underſtandings; and the Prophet is thereby in Danger to be tempted to proceed in Ways ſo eaſy and ſo acceptable, if he have not a good Share of Grace, and Honeſty, and Prudence.

It cannot well indeed be otherwiſe, but that Men who come with a light and trifling Spirit, prepared, and, as it were, reſolv'd to be pleas'd with nothing but external Garbs and Modes of ſpeaking, ſhould come to any Purpoſe, or return the wiſer or the better, let the Prophet ſay whate'er he can. It is in this caſe that Men ſeldom find any more than they ſeek for; and 'tis very natural to think that Men that only come to gratify their Curioſity, to hear ſome new things, ſome fine delightful Notions, and ſome fanciful Diſcourſe, and to obſerve the Method and the Style and way of Preaching, ſhould go away diſſatisfied if they meet *not* with theſe things, and perfectly unedified if they do.

Another Reaſon of the People's Non-Proficiency, may be, their having *no Opinion*, or conceit *at all* of the Prophet's Abilities; this is a worſe Extream than the other; very diſcouraging of the Prophet, damps his

his Spirits mightily, and checks the Vigour of his Thought, and cauſes him ſometimes to ſlacken his Endeavours. But whatever Effect it has on him, it cannot poſſibly have any good One on the People. They are thereby prediſpoſed to meet whatever ſhall be offered them, with neglect or ſupercilious Contempt. They have prejudg'd his Performances already, and all he ſays, ſeems but as idle talking. When once Men entertain a Prejudice againſt Men's Perſons or Abilities, it is not eaſie to be reconcil'd, or to attend to what they ſhall deliver. Either they will not let themſelves be perſwaded that what is ſaid, is true and reaſonable; or Truth it ſelf becomes unacceptable from them: Men hear, and ſee, and judge, by their Affections. When once we have debas'd a Man in our Opinion, his very Looks become unlovely, his Actions are ungraceful, and all his Wiſdom ſeems as Fooliſhneſs; the Spirit of Contradiction ſeizes on us, and we are ready to do Violence to our *own* Reaſon, rather than allow of *his*. The Complaint is of long ſtanding, that moſt Men mind more *who it is that* ſpeaks than *what it is* that's ſpoken. So that ſince 'tis plain, Affections difference People's Perſons, 'tis alſo plain they byaſs and corrupt Men's Judgments; and as the Exceſs corrupts them in their Favour, ſo want of Love corrupts them to their Prejudice. But, as I ſaid, this is the worſe Extream of the two,

for a good Opinion will improve the meaneſt Performances, ſome way or other, to its own advantage, whereas a bad one will not edifie under the ableſt Miniſtry. So true it is, that light and idle People, bring the Satisfaction along with them which they think they come to ſeek for in theſe Places. They come, they think, to be pleas'd, but indeed, they are pleas'd before with Fame, or ſomething elſe, and therefore come. One may ſay on this, as St. *James* ſays, on another Occaſion, *My Brethren, theſe things ought not to be.*

A Third Occaſion of Peoples Non-Proficiency may be, Their having by their Choice, or Accident, or Education, taken up ſome odd Opinions and peculiar Fancies in Religion, contrary to what is commonly and authoritatively taught; and Men are frequently ſo fond of their own Conceits and private Notions, that they do not only entertain with great Diſlike the Doctrines that oppoſe them, and the Reaſons that confute them, but for *their* Sakes, they frequently reject and caſt by all *beſides*; they will not abide what they have nothing to object to, for the Sake of ſomething that diſlikes them; that is, a Man muſt be of my ſide altogether, before he can talk acceptably, and if he do not agree with me in this or that particular, then I will diſſent from him in any other; which ſhews more Love to our *ſelves* than *Truth*, and that we rather like to

be *humour'd* than *convinc'd.* This is a very weak Occaſion of Non-Proficiency, but as weak as it is, it is too common; and beſides I am aſſigning Reaſons for ſuch Effects as few or no Cauſes are ſufficient for.

No, not even that which I am next in the *Fourth* place to aſſign, (*i. e.*) The evil Life and vicious Practice of the Prophets; for though the wicked Converſation of the Prieſt, be the moſt horrible Reproach imaginable, and miniſters occaſion to the greateſt Scandal poſſible, and ſhall be puniſh'd with the moſt intenſe Degree of Torment, yet it will by no means juſtifie any Imitation of his evil Practice, or excuſe the Neglect or Contempt of his Doctrines that are agreeable to Reaſon, and confirm'd by Scriptures. Becauſe it is certain, all Men are oblig'd to live by *Rule* and not *Example.* And though the Prieſt be indiſpenſibly obliged by all the Ties of Reaſon and Religion, to be himſelf the Example of the Rules of good Living, yet *his* Apoſtacy will cover no ones elſe from Blame or Puniſhment. Whether Prieſts the more immediate Miniſters in God's Service, are not tied to greater Sanctity and Strictneſs of Life, than other People, by God's Laws, may furniſh Matter for Diſpute, becauſe the Laws of Vertue and the Precepts of Morality are general and common to all Mankind together with the Prieſts, and all Men are obliged to be as good as poſſibly they can, and the Prieſts can be no more.

But rather than conteſt this Matter now, I ſhall take it for granted, That Prieſts have a cloſer Obligation to live well and vertuouſly than other People, and that Vice as ill becomes *them*, as Corruption of the Law does a Judge, though all Men are alike oblig'd to Juſtice and Impartiality; or as want of Honour and Reſpect to a Prince becomes a Courtier, though all Men are alike oblig'd to pay them all they can, and all that's due, and neither Judge nor Courtier can do more. Yet notwithſtanding this their cloſer Obligation, to live holily and well than other Peoples, *their* Relaxation of the Reins of Diſcipline and living in the Contradiction and Defiance to their Doctrines, as they cannot encourage any elſe to follow them in Practice, ſo they ought not to prejudice the Truth or Vertue of thoſe Doctrines, or to hinder the Operation of them to the Amendment of Men's Lives. They do indeed too commonly and too eaſily do it, but 'tis with no Reaſon; there is no tolerably inferring from one Man's evil Practice, to anothers evil Practice, and much leſs his Unbelief; there is no concluding the People's Security from the Wickedneſs or the Self-Condemnation of the Prieſt.

The Scandal that is given by wicked Miniſters, ſhall heat their Furnace Seven times hotter than the reſt, but the Scandal *taken* ſhall not leſſen any ones degree of Puniſhment; whoever offends by Example, ſhall

ſhall be as guilty, and liable to as great an Inflict̃ion as the Crime it ſelf deſerves, and ſhould have had, had there been no Example given, ſuppoſing that there be a Rule to walk by. *For it is Rule we are to live, and ſhall be judg'd by, and not Example.* An Example is indeed of uſe, to ſhew us that the Rule is practicable, and to excite us to Imitation, but every one in Truth is bound to be himſelf the Example of the Rule. *It is impoſſible*, our Saviour ſays, *but that Offences ſhould come, and wo to that Man by whom they come, it were better for him that a Milſtone were hanged about his Neck and he thrown into the Sea.* This will unqueſtionably be the Fate of evil Paſtors, that by vicious and diſorderly living give occaſion of Offence and falling to weak Chriſtians, but the falling thus and being thus offended is not hereby leſſened or excus'd; their Misfortunes do not grow the lighter. As the One ſhould not *give*, and ſhall be puniſhed for *giving*, ſo the other ſhould not *take*, and ſhall be puniſhed For *taking*, that Offence, againſt a plain Rule and poſitive Command to the contrary.

In very dubious and uncertain Matters, an Example may be as reaſonable and juſtifiable a Byaſs as any elſe whatever, if it be of One that is of preſum'd Integrity and Underſtanding, becauſe the following ſuch Example is following the beſt Reaſon we have, and acting according to the beſt of

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our Underſtanding, which is in dubious matters, or ſuch as lie beyond our Reach, chuſing the beſt for our ſelves we can. But in matters of Morality and plain Practice, where every ones Underſtanding is his Rule, and a ſufficient one too, there, not an Hundred nor a Thouſand Inſtances, are ſufficient to acquit a Man (no not even to himſelf) offending againſt a known Rule; for it is not *Number* but *Truth* that we muſt follow. Methinks I need not argue much in this Behalf, to ſhew that People ſhould not follow the Steps of wicked Prophets, whoſe Example they do commonly (and truly moſt deſervedly) deſpiſe and hate; but the Commonneſs of the Excuſe that People make that they cannot profit under an evil Miniſtry, will do more than juſtifie what has been ſaid on this Account. But it is, indeed, too near to flattering of our ſelves, to ſeek for Cauſes at ſuch Diſtance, which lurk at home ſo near us, even in our Hearts. And though the Parable of the Sower of Seed were primarily intended by our Saviour to ſhew the Impediments, that would obſtruct the Propagation of the Goſpel at its firſt preaching; yet it is very proper and well fitted to expreſs the ſeveral Cauſes that obſtruct its Influence on the minds of Men, in its progreſſion, even in every after Age and Generation. And to ſome Enquirers of the Non-proficiency of Hearers under the Miniſtry, we may aſſign this Fifth Cauſe. 5*thly*,

5*thly*, Some are Hearers *by the way ſide, where the Word is ſown, but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the Word that was ſown in their Hearts.* Some hear by *Chance*, and 'tis more than ſo, that they edify not at all with it. They ſtroll about like Vagrants, and light upon the Word of God, as on a thing they thought not of, and part with it as eaſily. They come without Deſign, without any Conſideration, or Preparation of the Heart; and as the Sower cannot ſcatter with ſo even a Hand, but ſome will fall by the way Side, beſides the Furrows and prepared Ground; ſo the Voice and Words of the Prophet will reach ſome that are as ill prepared to hear it, and who make ſo ſhort and little uſe of it, that they can hardly ſay they *loſt* it. It is no difficulty for Satan to ſnatch that away, they found at unawares, and cared ſo little for, and held ſo weakly and ſo ſlightly. 'Tis true indeed, that theſe unthinking Stragglers are ſometimes caught by ſomething accidentally delivered to them, and from a wavering and uncertain Faith, and looſe Morals, are ſuddenly reclaim'd and fix'd, both in their Judgment, and a ſteady Courſe of Vertue and Obedience, but this is ſuch an extraordinary unuſual Operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind, that as there is no promiſe of it made to any one, ſo there ought to be no Expectation of it. The leaſt that any one can bring

bring towards his Edification, is an Intention and Deſire of being edified; No one in Reaſon can expect to be ſo benefited againſt, or without their Will and Inclination. But neither is a previous bare Intention only to be edified ſufficient, for many come with this, and yet return as empty as they came: It is alſo neceſſary that ſome after-Care ſucceed, *for Satan* like a Bird of prey *commeth immediately, and takes away the Seed*, ſcarce cover'd over, *that was ſown in their Hearts*; diverts them preſently, and will not ſuffer them to meditate or think deliberately on what they heard. He hates Conſideration in the Sons of Men, and knows it is his mortal Enemy, and in a little time would overthrow his Kingdom, and therefore uſes all his art and cunning to prevent it.

Another ſort there are, our Saviour tell us, of Auditors that are repreſented by the Seed falling on the ſtony Ground; *Theſe hear the Word, and anon with Joy receive it, but having no Root, endure but for a time, for when Perſecution or Affliction ariſeth becauſe of the Word, they are preſently offended.* Abundance of People come to Church with very good Deſigns and Purpoſes, and behave themſelves well and devoutly there, liſten attentively, and are very much affected with what they hear, and ſtedfaſtly purpoſe to put in Practice what they find ſo applicable to, and what concerns themſelves. But when they

they come to make the Experiment, and put their good Reſolves in Execution; the hold that Eaſe and Pleaſure have taken on them is not eaſily let go; the Difficulties and Severities of Virtue and Religion ſtare them in the Face, and appear ſo formidable and unacceptable to humane Nature, that they immediately give up their better Reſolutions, and fall again into their uſual Courſes. They hear with Joy, and receive with Joy, and apply with Joy, and reſolve with Joy to profit themſelves of what they hear, but the Afflictions of Repentance and Obedience, of Mortification, and the want of what they have ſo long been us'd to; the Perſecution of Delight and Pleaſure that continually perſue and haunt the Mind; in a word, the leaving off delightful things, and taking up unuſual and unacceptable Ones, is a great Cauſe of Non-Proficiency; the Doctrine is agreeable to Reaſon; they ſee its great Convenience and Neceſſity indeed, but the Difficulty of the Practice, ſpoils all, and ſets them back again, and leaves them as their Reſolutions found them; they would be admirable Chriſtians, if nothing but Conſent of Reaſon and Judgment were wanting; if they might live as they deſire and do, without forſaking what they like, and taking up with what they like by no means: if believing what we ſay and firmly purpoſing to act accordingly, were to edify, they would edify

moſt abundantly; but as to practiſing what they hear, they ſay with *Naaman. The Lord pardon them in that thing.*

Another ſort of unprofiting Hearers, are repreſented by our Saviour by the Seed that fell among the Thorns---*Such as hear the Word, And the Cares of this World, and the Deceitfulneſs of Riches, and the Luſts of other things entring in choke the Word, and it becometh unfruitful.* The former would have profited but for Pleaſure, theſe would be edified but that Gain and Buſineſs hinder them. They hear right, and underſtand and apply right, but their minds are eſtrang'd and carried off, by their intenſe Deſires of growing Rich, and by the Multiplicity of their Concerns, and clutter of Affairs: The World has taken ſuch hold and faſtening on their Hearts, that when they find themſelves mov'd by any thing we ſay, and are inclin'd to looſen and relax, to mind their better and more laſting Intereſt, it ſtill throws out ſome bait or other to detain and keep them, ſome weighty thing or other interferes, and either voids their Reſolutions quite, or elſe deferrs them to a more convenient Seaſon, which gives another like-Temptation Means and Opportunity to enter, and obtain its day of hearing, and ſo the Life is loſt in a Circle of Reſo'utions and Defeats, in Promiſes and ſtedfaſt Purpoſes, and cold Complaints for want of Opportunities. As the Prophet

accuſes

accuſes in the Text: *With their Mouth they ſhew much Love, but their Heart goeth after their Covetouſneſs.* They are ſenſibly affected with what they hear and learn, and like it very well, and expreſs their Liking in Deſires and Reſolutions to obſerve and practiſe it, but their Hearts, when they come to Tryal, fail them and deceive them, and can't be diſentangled from their Buſineſs and the Proſecution of their gainful Callings, and Deſigns. When their Minds aſpire to heavenly things, this fatal Poiſe and Tendency to worldly Wealth, cloggs them and drags them downwards ſtill, although againſt their Reaſon and Reſolutions; and if this Son's Preferment and that Daughter's Fortune were ſecured, they could attend on God without Diſtraction; they would then forſake a vain and ſinful World, and its deceitful Riches, and lay up better and more laſting Treaſures in a better place, *where neither Moth nor Ruſt doth corrupt, and where no Thieves break through and ſteal*; but before this comes to paſs, the Man grows old, and ſees his little Images in Children's Children, and Nature quickens him again to greater Fondneſs, and they muſt have their Portions from new Toils and new Anxieties, and the Cares of this World begin again, and the Deceitfulneſs of Riches choaks the Word that h th ſo oft been heard with Joy and Gladneſs, and notwithſtanding all his Approbation and his Reſolu-

tions to improve, yet it becomes unfruitful.

I know not well, how proper you may think it to aſſign ſuch Cauſes of Men's Non-proficiency under the Miniſtry of Preaching, when the Pretence and End of Preaching is to remove thoſe Cauſes and Impediments: It looks as if Phyſicians ſhould excuſe their ill Succeſs, by aſſigning ſuch and ſuch Obſtructions to the Energy of their Medicines, when 'tis the proper Buſineſs of their Art and Calling to remove thoſe very Obſtructions; it may rather ſeem to betray the Weakneſs of the Word of the Lord, to ſay that the Luſts and Pleaſures, the Cares and Love of Riches hinder it from being fruitful, when 'tis that Word it ſelf, that is to mortify thoſe Luſts, ſubdue thoſe Longings, remove thoſe Cares, and kill that Love of Riches at the very Root. To this we muſt ſay, that however powerfully and ſtrongly the Spirit of God may ſometimes operate on the Souls of Men, work off their Hearts, and Inclinations from the Riches or the Pleaſures of this Life, and change them unaccountably and almoſt in an Inſtant, which no one can deny has ſometimes, in ſomes Caſes, happened; yet this is extraordinary, and no where promis'd, and therefore no where to be look'd for, or depended on; it is like mighty, unexpected, undeſerved Favours to be accepted with all Joy and Thankfulneſs, and to be carefully improved to all Advantage, but 'tis what

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no one elſe muſt look for, though in the ſame Condition, and the ſame Neceſſity. The ordinary and uſual Way, is arguing and enforcing People's Duties, by their proper Motives; ſhewing the Reaſonableneſs, Convenience and Neceſſity of their performing them, which muſt for its Effect depend upon the Grace of God, and on the Will, Capacity, and Teachableneſs of the Hearer. So that in the ordinary Converſion of a Sinner from the Evil of his Ways, theſe three are unavoidably concern'd.

Firſt, The Miniſter muſt do his Part, which is to ſhew the Unreaſonableneſs of the Ways of Sin, the natural Turpitude and unagreeable Deformity there is in Vice, how oppoſite it is to the Natural Light within, and to the Dictates of our Conſcience, how prejudicial to them as they are Men, and live in this World, with Reſpect to bodily Health, to Reputation, and a good Name, and to their thriving in their Callings. Next to the Reaſonableneſs of Virtue and Obedience, he can only ſhew the Convenience and Neceſſity of complying with the Will of God; the Peace and Pleaſure and Content of Mind that conſtantly attends the doing it, together with the ineffable, eternal Recompence that follows it, hereafter. Or on the other Hand, the Pain, uneaſyneſs, and terrible Anxiety of Heart, the Affliction of a fearful and ſuſpicious Mind, the Reproaches of Reaſon, the Remorſe of Conſci-

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ence and that Hell on Earth that conſtantly attends the guilty and the obſtinately diſobedient, together with a fearful looking for of Judgment, that will certainly conſign them over to Pains and Sorrows that will know no Meaſure nor no end. This is all the Miniſter can do, to urge Men to their Duties by their Fitneſs, by promiſes and threats, and by whatever other Motives are contain'd in holy Scriptures, to preſs them in, and out of Seaſon, and to contribute all he can, to their producing their Effect. And though there may be mighty difference in the Way and Manner of propoſing things, that ſome Men do it much more forcibly, and clearly, and convincingly, than others, and in a much more acceptable Way, yet even the beſt of them can do no more than juſt propoſe, and lay theſe things before them; *Paul may plant and Apollos water, but 'tis from God that the increaſe muſt come*; there is both need of his preventing and aſſiſting Grace, and 'tis from him we muſt expect the Bleſſing. 'Tis certain that without him of our ſelves we can do nothing, but it is as certain that he never fails what Grace is neceſſary and ſufficient for that purpoſe, if Men will uſe their beſt Endeavours, and employ his gifts as he ſhall order and direct them. Where-ever any thing depends, for its Effect, on God and Man, in Conjunction, and Co-operation together, we may be ſure that God is never wanting to perform his

his part, if Man will do but his; and though it may be difficult (in many Caſes utterly impoſſible) for any one to know, or to deſcribe the Methods and the Meaſures of God's Grace, in working on the Hearts and Minds of People, to Converſion, yet of this we may be ſure, That Work it does, unleſs we our ſelves put ſome Hindrance and Impediment in its Way; and of this we may be alſo full as ſure, That the Operations of his Grace, and holy Spirit, do not at all depend upon our Knowledge or our Underſtanding how and when they operate: And that therefore, there is no expecting or attending till it operate, that we may our ſelves begin; for Grace, like the Kingdom of God, comes not by Obſervation; but we muſt do our Duty, all that poſſibly we can, our ſelves, and God will not be wanting. So that no one can excuſe or cover his Continuance in Sin, upon Pretence that the Grace of God will not help him out; that, for his Part, he is very willing, and uſes his utmoſt Endeavours to extricate and diſentangle himſelf, but that the Grace of God is wanting to him, without which he cannot ſtir: That's true, That without the Grace of God he cannot extricate himſelf, but it neither is nor can be true, that if he be himſelf willing, and uſes his utmoſt Endeavours, that the Grace of God will fail, for it is by God's Grace that he is willing, and by God's Grace that he endeavours

deavours thus to free himſelf; for naturally and of our ſelves we are told, we can neither *will*, nor *do* any thing of that Kind: and the applying all ſuch Arguments and Motives to our Duty, as it hath pleaſed God to reveal to us, and the uſing all thoſe Means and Inſtruments which he diſcovers to us, and deſigns for thoſe good Purpoſes, is uſing and improving of the Grace of God, that Grace that is ordinarily requiſite and neceſſary to Converſion. So that the Guilt at length will unavoidably devolve upon the Offender only. God cannot poſſibly be wanting, the Prophet cannot eaſily, (*i. e.*) ſo far as to excuſe the Offender, and therefore Men themſelves are only chargeable, and they muſt look at home, for their Converſion, or their Condemnation: From all which it will appear, that though the Objection be ſo far true, that it is the Work of God's Word, and proper Buſineſs of the Preacher to cure theſe Evils, to remove theſe Obſtacles, and to ſubdue theſe Luſts and evil Appetites that hinder the Word of God from taking its Effect, and to reduce the diſobedient, and reclaim the wandring Sinner from his evil Ways, yet it is by no means true, that it is derogatory to the Grace of God that it works not forcibly and irreſiſtibly upon the Minds of Men to their Converſion; nor to the Power of God's Word in the Mouths and Sermons of his Meſſengers and Prophets,

phets, that their preaching and endeavours prove ſo ineffectual and unedifying; ſince all the force they either do or can uſe, is natural and moral Suaſion; they can but ſtir the Paſſions and Affections, and work upon the Reaſon and Underſtanding of People by ſuitable and proper Arguments, and whether they ſhall do that, depends very much upon the People themſelves, but whether, when that is done, it ſhall prove effectual, (*i. e.*) ſhall influence them to Practice, depends entirely on them. They can, but like Phyſicians, preſcribe a true and proper Medicine, and tell the Dangers of continuing in that evil State, but ſtill the Uſe and Application of this Remedy depends and will depend upon the Patient.

It remains, That I make an Inference or Two from what hath been ſaid, and ſo conclude. And,

Firſt, Since it is plain from the conſtant, ordinary, and uſual Method of God's proceeding in the converting and changing the People's minds, that they muſt, to make them blameable and puniſhable by him, be at Liberty, whether they will receive Inſtruction or no, and practiſe afterwards what they ſhall be convinced becomes their Duty; ſince it is plain, I ſay, they muſt be at their Liberty, it is alſo plain that the Fault muſt lie upon themſelves, and that they have it in their power to mend; and ſince all the Cauſes that either have been, or that

can be reaſonably aſſigned for People's Nonproficiency under the ordinary and ſtanding Miniſtry of Preaching, are ſuch as do entirely depend upon the People themſelves, there is no longer Time allowed for their Enquiries why, and their Complainings that they *do not* edifie and profit more: For now the Power is in their Hands, and ſuch a Power, as may be for their Edification, or Deſtruction: Life and Death is ſet before them; the Bread of Life, the Word of God; that as they chuſe, and uſe it, will be ſure to prove either the Savour of Death to Death, or elſe the Word of Everlaſting Life and Health: And therefore there is need of all their Care and Diligence in Hearing and Attending, Treaſuring up, and Practiſing their Duties, that they may not come together for the worſe, but better. As therefore every Body owns they come to Church with a Deſign to hear, and be inſtructed in, what they know not; or to be put in mind of what they knew, but had forgotten, and to be moved to practiſe it; ſo the leaſt that they can do in common Kindneſs to themſelves, is, to ſee they do not loſe their Labour: But when it is moreover a Buſineſs of the Greateſt Moment and Importance in the World they are about, they are obliged undoubtedly to hear to purpoſe, and, to that End, to come with Minds prepared to hear the Truth, and to receive it kindly, though it thwart their

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neareſt Intereſts, or their deareſt Inclinations; to lay aſide all Prejudice and Prepoſſeſſion, either againſt Men's Perſons, or their Doctrines, and to attend alone to what is ſaid, and weigh its Reaſonableneſs with Candour and Impartiality, according to the Truth, and its Conformity with Holy Scriptures. Men muſt not judge of either Prophets, or their Doctrines, by their own Affections or Deſires: They muſt not do as *Ahab* did by *Micaiah*; *I know*, ſaith he, *there is one Micaiah, the Son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not propheſie Good concerning me, but Evil.* The weak Prince had no regard to the Truth at all, but had rather be deceived, than not pleaſed; and hated him, becauſe he propheſied unacceptable Things. Men muſt not look to be indulged in Things unlawful, and forbidden by God; or that his Meſſage ſhould not be delivered openly and plainly, though it would wound their Ears, and pierce their Hearts with many Sorrows. He ill becomes his Character, and little underſtands the Nature or the Dignity of his Calling, that will for Intereſt or Ambition, Fear or Favour, Love or Hate, diſſemble in theſe Matters: And he is lamentably over-run with Fondneſs to himſelf, that would be for the preſent cheated into Peace, and falſe Security, and knows it cannot laſt, but that his Dream will quickly end,

and he ſhall wake in laſting and ſubſtantial Miſery.

As it is the Prophet's Part to ſay with that *Micaiah*, (when he was tempted to delude the King with ſoft and pleaſing Propheeies,) *As the Lord liveth, what the Lord ſaith unto me, that will I ſpeak*; ſo is it to be the People's Part to anſwer as the Children of *Iſrael* did to *Moſes*, when he had been telling all the Words and Judgments of the Lord, to ſay, *All the Words which the Lord hath ſaid, will we do, and be obedient.*

You are not to conſider whether what we ſay be acceptable to Fleſh and Blood; whether the Doctrines we deliver be conſiſtent with your Profit, or your Pleaſure; whether they croſs your Intereſt, or your Inclination, nor any thing beſides; but whether God hath ſpoken by us, whether the Things we ſay be ſo, or no, in Holy Scriptures; whether the Duties we exhort to be ſo much your Intereſt and Concern to follow and perform, as we perſuade; whether ſuch Peace and Satisfaction here, and ſuch Eternal, excellent Rewards hereafter, are aſſigned and promiſed to your Faith, and your Obedience; and whether ſuch amazing Puniſhments and Pains in Everlaſting Fire are treaſured up againſt the Day of Wrath and Retribution, for the ungodly Unbelievers and impenitent. And if you find theſe Things are ſo, you will make the Inference with St. *Peter*; *What manner of Perſons ought you to be in all holy*

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Converſation and Godlineſs? And ſee the great Neceſſity there is of complying with St. *James*'s Advice, *To lay a-part all Filthineſs, and Superfluity of Naughtineſs, and receive with Meekneſs the engraffed Word, which is able to ſave your Souls. To be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only, deceiving your own Selves.*

Secondly, If it was thus even with *Ezekiel* and the other Meſſengers of God, with *Moſes* and the Prophets, with Chriſt himſelf and his Diſciples; if they had Reaſon to complain of their unkind Reception in the World, of the Hardneſs of People's Hearts and Unbelief, and of the little Fruit they found of all their Care and Labour in performance of their Offices; if Men were deaf to all their Charms, charmed they never ſo wiſely, warmly and affectionately, there is leſs need that any now-adays, the faint and feeble Imitators of their Zeal and Vertue, ſhould complain of their hard Fortune upon theſe Occaſions. It is, in truth, a very great Diſcouragement in it ſelf, to ſee ſuch ardent Longings after People's Benefit, ſuch zealous Proſecutions of it, in ſuch painful and induſtrious manner, prove ſo ineffectual as they oft-times do. But though it may be Matter of Complaint and Sorrow, yet it is none of Fear, or of Repentance, when they do their Duty: They have theſe great Examples ſet before them, as well for

for their Comfort, as their Imitation, that they ſhould follow them in the careful and Conſcientious Diſcharge of their great Office, and leave, with them, the Iſſue in the Hands of God; well knowing, that whatever be the Event, they ſhall be judg'd with righteous Judgment, and ſhall receive a glorious Recompence at God's Hand, for all their good Deſigns, and good Endeavours, although the Folly, or the Obſtinacy of ungodly People may have fruſtrated them both.

The Labours of the Prophets have a Three Fold End --- The Firſt, and beſt, and moſt deſign'd by God, is the effecting his good Purpoſes in bringing People to Repentance and Salvation; the Second is the diſcharging of their Duties, and the exemplifying their Obedience in the ſeveral Inſtances of his Commands, and the ſaving of their own Souls. The Third and laſt, and the moſt lamentable one, is, the juſtifying God in his Judgments, and vindicating him in his Inflictions; that all Pretence of Ignorance, and Inability, and of Forgetfulneſs, may be deſtroyed by their Inſtructions, Admonitions, and Reproofs, and by their frequently repeated Cries and Calls, both in and out of Seaſon, to Repentance, that Men may carry Condemnation in their Boſoms to the Day of Doom, and acquit their Judge before the World of Men and Angels. *That they* (as St. *Auſtin* ſomewhere

ſomewhere ſays, with which I will conclude) *who will not glorify God's Mercy in the Amendment of their Lives here, may glorify his Juſtice in their Puniſhment hereafter.*

FINIS.

Pag. 8. line the laſt, for *damp* read *damps*.

A Sermon Preached before the Queen, at *White-Hall*, on *February* the 12th. 169$\frac{1}{2}$.

A Sermon Preached before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen, at St. *Mary le Bow*, on *Friday* the 11th. of *April*, 1692. Being the Faſt-Day.

Another Sermon Preached at *Guild-Hall*-Chapel, *December* the 11th, 1692. before the Right Honourable the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen.

All Three by *W. Fleetwood*, Chaplain in Ordinary to Their Majeſties.

All Sold by Thomas Newborough, *at the* Golden-Ball *in St.* Paul's Church-Yard.

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